

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

Claim 1 (Currently Amended) A lawnmower deck comprising:

a deck sub-assembly having a first stiffness and including:

a top surface;

a skirt extending outwardly and downwardly from the top surface and encircling the top surface, the skirt defining:

a cutting chamber underneath the top surface; and

a plurality of wheel mounts; and

a stiffener connected to at least one of the top surface and the skirt so that the stiffener and the deck sub-assembly together have a combined stiffness that is at least approximately 20% greater than the first stiffness,

wherein the deck sub-assembly further comprises an endless loop channel on the top surface, the endless loop channel receiving the stiffener.

Claim 2 (Original): The lawnmower deck according to claim 1, wherein the stiffener includes:

two side stiffener sections; and

two transverse stiffener sections being connected to the side stiffener sections.

Claim 3 (Original): The lawnmower deck according to claim 2, further including a cover extending over the stiffener and connected to the deck sub-assembly.

Claim 4 (Previously Presented): A lawnmower deck comprising:

a deck sub-assembly having a first stiffness and including:

a top surface;

a skirt extending outwardly and downwardly from the top surface and encircling the top surface, the skirt defining:

a cutting chamber underneath the top surface; and

a plurality of wheel mounts;

a stiffener connected to at least one of the top surface and the skirt so that the stiffener and the deck sub-assembly together have a combined stiffness that is at least approximately 20% greater than the first stiffness, the stiffener including an endless loop on the top surface, two side stiffener sections, and two transverse stiffener sections being connected to the side stiffener sections; and

a cover extending over the stiffener and connected to the deck sub-assembly.

Claim 5 (Original): The lawnmower deck according to claim 4, wherein the plurality of wheel mounts include at least a first pair of wheel mounts; and

the first stiffness and the combined stiffness are measured between the first pair of wheel mounts.

Claim 6 (Original): The lawnmower deck according to claim 5, wherein the first stiffness is one of a bending stiffness and a torsional stiffness and the combined stiffness is a corresponding one of a bending stiffness and a torsional stiffness.

Claim 7 (Original): The lawnmower deck according to claim 6, wherein the first stiffness and the combined stiffness are each a bending stiffness;

the plurality of wheel mounts further include a third wheel mount;

the deck further includes a torsional stiffness measured between the third wheel mount and one wheel mount of the first pair of wheel mounts so that the stiffener and the deck together have a second combined stiffness measured between the third wheel mount and the one wheel mount, the second combined stiffness is at least 20% greater than the second stiffness.

Claim 8 (Original): The lawnmower deck according to claim 7, wherein the plurality of wheel mounts further includes a fourth wheel mount; and

the lawnmower deck further including a pair of handle mounts located above the third and fourth wheel mounts.

Claim 9 (Original): The lawnmower deck according to claim 8, wherein the stiffener extends between each of the wheel mounts.

Claim 10 (Original): The lawnmower deck according to claim 9, wherein the stiffener comprises a metallic hollow tube;

the deck comprises plastic; and

the stiffener is overmolded with the deck.

Claim 11 (Original): The lawnmower deck according to claim 10, wherein the combined stiffness is at least 30% greater than the first stiffness.

Claim 12 (Original): The lawnmower deck according to claim 3, wherein the deck further comprises a channel and the stiffener is received in the channel.

Claims 13-17 (Canceled).

Claim 18 (Previously Presented): A walk-behind lawnmower comprising:

- a deck having a longitudinal axis and including:

- an engine bed;

- a skirt centered on the engine bed and extending outwardly and

downwardly from the engine bed and encircling the engine bed, the skirt defining:

- a cutting chamber below the engine bed;

- a discharge chute in communication with the cutting chamber;

- two laterally spaced front wheel mounts at the front of the deck;

- two laterally spaced rear wheel mounts at the rear of the deck; and

- a channel extending between each of the wheel mounts and including:

- a first channel portion extending longitudinally along the deck; and

- a second channel portion extending transversely along the deck;

- a stiffener received in the channel;

- a cover extending over the stiffener;

- a prime mover mounted on the engine bed; and

- a handle connected to the deck.

Claim 19 (Original): The walk-behind lawnmower according to claim 18, wherein the stiffener encircles the engine bed.

Claim 20 (Original): The walk-behind lawnmower according to claim 19, wherein the stiffener comprises:

two side stiffener sections; and

two transverse stiffener sections connected to the side stiffener sections.

Claim 21 (Original): The walk-behind lawnmower according to claim 20, wherein the one of the transverse stiffener sections extends between the front wheel mounts;

the other of the transverse stiffener sections extends between the rear wheel mounts;

each of the side stiffener sections extends between a respective one of the front wheel mounts and a respective one of the rear wheel mount.

Claim 22 (Currently Amended): A walk-behind lawnmower comprising:

a deck having:

an engine bed;

a skirt centered on the engine bed and extending outwardly and downwardly from the engine bed and encircling the engine bed, the skirt defining:

a cutting chamber below the engine bed;

a discharge chute in communication with the cutting chamber;

two laterally spaced front wheel mounts at the front of the deck;  
two laterally spaced rear wheel mounts at the rear of the deck; and  
a channel extending between each of the wheel mounts and along the discharge chute;

a stiffener received in the channel;  
a cover extending over the stiffener;  
a prime mover mounted on the engine bed; and  
a handle connected to the deck;

wherein the stiffener encircles the engine bed and includes:

two side stiffener sections; and  
two transverse stiffener sections connected to the side stiffener sections;

wherein the one of the transverse stiffener sections extends between the front wheel mounts; the other of the transverse stiffener sections extends between the rear wheel mounts; and each of the side stiffener sections extends between a respective one of the front wheel mounts and a respective one of the rear wheel mount[-];

wherein each of the side stiffener sections includes:

two inclined sections; and  
a substantially horizontal section intermediate the inclined sections;  
the cover engages the substantially horizontal sections, one of the inclined sections and the other transverse stiffener section; and

the cover is spaced from the other of the inclined sections and the one transverse stiffener section.

Claim 23 (Original): The walk-behind lawnmower according to claim 22, wherein the skirt further defines a vertical wall spaced from the discharge chute and extending upwardly relative to the engine bed;

the one inclined section on one of the side stiffener sections extends along the vertical wall; and

the one of the inclined sections of the other of the side stiffener sections extends along the discharge chute.

Claim 24 (Original): The walk-behind lawnmower according to claim 23, wherein the one transverse stiffener section is connected to one end of each of the side stiffener sections; and

the other transverse stiffener section is connected to the other end of each of the side stiffener sections and extends from the vertical wall to the discharge chute.

Claim 25 (Original): The walk-behind lawnmower according to claim 24, wherein the one transverse stiffener section is connected to one end of each of the side stiffener sections; and

the other transverse stiffener section is connected to the side stiffener sections intermediate the one transverse stiffener section and the other end of each of the side stiffener sections.

Claim 26 (Original): The walk-behind lawnmower according to claim 25, wherein each of the wheel mounts comprises a pivot bearing adapted to pivotally support a height adjustment lever; and

the one transverse stiffener section is aligned with the pivot bearings of the front wheel mounts.

Claim 27 (Original): The walk-behind lawnmower according to claim 26, further comprises a pair of handle mounts, each handle mount is located above a respective one of the rear wheel mounts and is connected to the stiffener; and

the handle is connected to the handle mounts.

Claim 28 (Original): The walk-behind lawnmower according to claim 27, wherein the handle mounts are connected to the stiffener proximate the junction of the side stiffener sections and the other transverse stiffener section.

Claim 29 (Original): The walk-behind lawnmower according to claim 27, wherein the handle mounts are formed in the other ends of the side stiffener sections.

Claim 30 (Original): The walk-behind lawnmower according to claim 27, wherein the deck comprises plastic and the stiffener comprises metal.



Claim 31 (Original): The walk-behind lawnmower according to claim 27, wherein the skirt further defines ribs extending between the front wheel mounts on either side of the one transverse stiffener; and

the cover extends over the ribs.

Claim 32 (Previously Presented): The walk-behind lawnmower according to claim 18, wherein the channel further comprising:

a third channel portion extending longitudinally along the deck; and

a fourth channel portion extending transversely along the deck.

Claim 33 (Previously Presented): The walk-behind lawnmower according to claim 32, wherein the first, second, third and fourth channel portions defining an endless loop channel.

Claims 34-35 (Canceled).